



Grant Guidelines and Application Instructions

2015 Specialty Crop Block Grant Funds

Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) 10.170

The Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) is pleased to announce a competitive grant process to award Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funds for projects that solely enhance the competitiveness of U.S. grown specialty crops. Funding is provided to state departments of agriculture from the 2014 Farm Bill through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service. The SCBGP allocation formula is the average of the most recent available value of specialty crop cash receipts in the State and the acreage of specialty crop production in the State.

MDA will administer approximately \$340,000 in funds for the development of specialty crop projects that will solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops in Maryland. Specialty crops are defined by USDA as fruits, vegetables, tree nuts, dried fruits, horticulture and nursery crops (including floriculture). Please visit the [USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant program](#) to view a comprehensive list of eligible specialty crops and ineligible commodities under the SCBGP.

Please contact Karen Fedor, Program Coordinator, at Karen.fedor@maryland.gov or 410-841-5773 to discuss proposal ideas prior to the deadline.

Eligibility

MDA is seeking proposals from eligible non-profit organizations, government entities, for-profit organizations, and universities for projects that aim to promote or enhance the production of and access to Maryland specialty crops. Applicants must have the support of a specific specialty crop organization or group of at least 3 specialty crop producers. Proposals submitted by individual producers must demonstrate that the potential impact of the project will be for a broader group of similar producers or industry segment. Projects must also be identified as a priority of the industry through letters of support from producer organizations and/or producers. Applicants must also be able to administer funds according to federal requirements. Please visit the [USDA Specialty Crop Block Grant program](#) for requirements.

In order to be eligible to participate, applicants must reside or their business or educational affiliation must be in Maryland. Those applicants that are non-profit or for-profit, if awarded a grant, will be required to provide verification of their status.

NOTE: Grant funds will not be awarded for projects that only benefit or provide profit to a single organization, business, institution or individual. Projects must benefit multiple beneficiaries.

Examples of Acceptable Projects

- A single grower requests funds to demonstrate the viability of organic small fruit production and partners with Cooperative Extension to publicize the working model of diversification to other regional growers.

- A single farmer erects high tunnels on their property to extend the growing season of tomatoes and lettuce and conducts a field day and farm tour to encourage other small family farmers to adopt the production methods.
- A single specialty crop organization requests funds to conduct an advertising campaign that will benefit their specialty crop members.

Examples of Unacceptable Projects

- A company requests grant funds to purchase starter plants or equipment used to plant, cultivate, and grow a specialty crop for the purpose of making a profit, or to expand production of a single business.
- A county requests grant funds to make grants to individual specialty crop businesses or roadside stands to promote their individual business.
- A sole proprietor requests grant funds to redesign her/his logo in order to make her/his specialty crop value-added product stand out at the local farmers market.
- A company that develops specialty crop value-added products requests funds to train its employees how to make its value-added products.
- A specialty crop producer requests funds to promote their asparagus at a roadside stand.

Funding

Minimum amount: \$15,000. The Maryland SCBGP grants have ranged from \$15,000 - \$140,000.

Matching Funds and In-Kind Contributions: Matching funds are not required; however, we consider the levels and sources of matching funds to be a key criterion for evaluating proposals. We want to make the best use of available resources and will give special consideration to proposals that demonstrate applicant commitment to the project in terms of cash contribution and that maximize the leveraging of funds.

If matching funds are proposed as a mechanism to ensure all grant funds will solely enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops, the recipient must keep complete records that identify and document the specific costs or contributions proposed to meet the match or cost-share, the source of funding or contributions, and document how the valuation was determined.

Indirect Costs: Indirect costs are not fundable.

Project Duration: Projects must be completed within two calendar years. Expenditures incurred prior to grant award **may not** be included in the grant request or eligible for reimbursement. All travel related meals and incidentals will be reimbursed at the Federal per diem rate and not based on actual expenditures. Projects will not be awarded until the USDA has made their official award announcement, expected in November 2015, and a contract has been signed with MDA.

MDA encourages organizations to develop projects to solely enhance the competitiveness of specialty crops pertaining to the following issues affecting the industry:

Food Safety Compliance

- Mitigating food safety risks including implementation of practices, trainings or systems development, cost-share of Good Agricultural Practices audits and implementation;

Market Enhancement

- Increase sales and marketability and drive demand for commercially-grown specialty crops for retail, wholesale or institution level, i.e. schools, restaurants, grocery stores, nurseries and other businesses;

Plant Health and Pest Management

- Prevention and management of pests and diseases to protect markets and minimize economic harm to specialty crop growers, including integrated pest management;

MDA encourages the development of partnerships, including multi-state projects. Applicants should check “Other Focus Area” in the Application and indicate the focus area of their project.

Funding Restrictions

Advertising and public relations costs used to solely promote the image of an organization, general logo, or general brand, rather than specialty crops, is unallowable.

For example:

- A promotional campaign to increase sales of “XYZ Grown” Watermelon is acceptable while increasing brand awareness of “XYZ Grown” generically is not.
- Promoting tomatoes while including an organization’s logo in the promotion is acceptable, while generally promoting an organization’s logo is not.
- Promotional items could say “Buy XYZ Grown Apples” but not “XYZ Grown”, which promotes XYZ generically.
- A promotional campaign to increase producer sales of “XYZ Grown fruits and vegetables” is acceptable while increasing membership in “XYZ Grown” generically is not.

Coupon Incentive Programs:

Grant funds cannot be used for coupon/incentive redemptions or price discounts. Costs associated with printing, distribution, or promotion of coupons/tokens or price discounts (i.e., a print advertisement that contains a clip-out coupon) are allowable only if they solely promote the specialty crop rather than promote or benefit a program or single organization.

Promotional Materials:

Grant funds cannot be used for costs associated with the use of trade shows, meeting rooms, displays, demonstrations, exhibits, and the rental of space for activities that do not solely promote specialty crops *unless* you can easily identify and track what portion of the expenses should be paid for with SCBGP funds and which should be covered with outside funding. You must explain how you will track the SCBGP funds and non-SCBGP funds in your application.

Timeline

May 8, 2015	Grant Proposals Due to MDA at 4:00 pm EST
July 2015	Maryland State Plan submitted to USDA
November, 2015	Announcement & Award Grant Agreements

Review Criteria and Process

Please see Attachment A for Review Criteria. Grant applications will be reviewed and evaluated by a diverse group of individuals active in agriculture. MDA reserves the right to reject any or all proposals, as well as increase or decrease the amount of requested funding based on the evaluation and the level of available funds. Should the proposal review process suggest a funding level less than the amount requested, MDA staff will confer with the applicant to determine whether the amount recommended would significantly impact the project's overall feasibility.

Post Award Management

Grantees will enter into a grant agreement with the Maryland Department of Agriculture (MDA) which includes “General Terms and Conditions” in Attachment B.

Quarterly Reimbursements and Funding Advances

Quarterly reimbursements is conditioned upon receipt and approval by the Program Coordinator of the Deliverable(s) specified in the Scope of Work and shall be accompanied by reasonable assurance (documentation, receipts, invoices, etc.) that the goods and services for which payment is requested were received and performed. MDA has the right to disallow costs determined inappropriate or unreasonable. The Program Coordinator shall have a minimum of thirty (30) working days to approve the Deliverable(s) and process payment request forms.

Requests for fund advances will be considered on a case by case basis. If a funding advance is requested, the need for the advance must be clearly stated in the project proposal.

Advances will be limited to the minimum amounts needed to meet current disbursement needs and will be scheduled so the funds are available closely as is administratively possible to the actual expenditures by the grantee. In addition, initial funding advances shall not **exceed 25%** of the total grant award and must be expended within 30 days of receipt.

If any changes or revisions occur in the project, the project manager must notify the MDA needs to approve changes or revisions advance. Site visits, including review of books, will occur on a regular basis.

Reporting Requirements

An interim performance and financial report will be required along with a final performance and financial report due 90 days following the end of the grant agreement.

Application Instructions – Use this information to fill out the SCBGP Application

- 1. Project Title and Synopsis** - Include the title of each project and a synopsis of 200 words or less. The synopsis must contain a summary of the proposed project, suitable for dissemination to the public, and include a statement of objectives and methods to be used.
- 2. Project Partner and Organization** - Include the name of the organization that will partner with the Maryland Department of Agriculture to lead and execute the project.
- 3. Project Purpose** - The following questions should be addressed in this section:
 - a) What is the specific issue, problem, opportunity, or need to be addressed by the project?
 - b) Why is the project important and timely?
 - c) What are the objectives of the project?
 - d) If any of the project activities or costs has the potential to enhance the competitiveness of non-specialty crops (ex: farmers market, general buy local, CSA etc.) describe the methods or processes you will implement to verify all grant funds are expended on activities and costs that only enhance the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops. If you propose a cost-share or match to cover non-specialty crop activities and costs, include the specific costs or contributions proposed to meet the cost-share or match, the source of funding or contributions, and describe how you determined the appropriate amount of cost-share or match.
 - e) If the project is a continuation of a project that the Specialty Crop Block Grant Program (SCBGP) funded previously, describe how the project differs from and builds on the previous project's efforts. Describe also the likelihood of the project becoming self-sustaining and not indefinitely dependent on grant funds. Specifically, provide a summary (3 to 5 sentences per project) of the accomplishments of the previous project that have led you to seek continued funding.
- 4. Potential Impact** - This section should show how the project potentially impacts the specialty crop industry rather than only a particular commercial product, single organization, institution, or individual. The following questions should be answered in a paragraph format:
 - a) Who are the specialty crop beneficiaries of the project?
 - b) How many specialty crop beneficiaries will the project benefit?
 - c) How will the project benefit the specialty crop beneficiaries, i.e. value of sales?
 - d) What is the potential economic benefit to Maryland's specialty crop producers?
- 5. Expected Measurable Outcomes** - Provide at least one distinct, quantifiable, measurable project outcome that solely supports enhancing the competitiveness of eligible specialty crops. If the outcome measures are long-term and occur after the project's completion, then identify an intermediate outcome that occurs before the end of the grant period and that is expected to help lead to the fulfillment of long-term outcomes. For further information on expected measurable outcomes, please see the [Outcomes Model](#) or this [Educational Bulletin](#).
 - Provide a **Goal** - A goal is what you hope to achieve as a result of conducting the activities and producing the outputs (tangible results that can be seen, touched, handled, or moved about) of the project. Examples of outcome-oriented goals could include a change in knowledge, change in behavior, change in conditions that make a difference for the beneficiaries of the project.
 - Provide a **Performance Measure**. Identify a performance measure for each goal that you will use to measure the actual project results compared to the expected results. These are usually

expressed in quantifiable terms and should be objective and measurable (numeric values, percentages, scores and indices, although in certain circumstances qualitative measures are appropriate).

- Provide a **Benchmark** - For each performance measure provided, include benchmark. The benchmark is the baseline data against which you will measure your success. Examples of a benchmark could include current or initial level of knowledge, current behavior, or current conditions.
- Provide a **Target** - For each benchmark provided, indicate the target. The target is the level of change that you anticipate by the completion of the project. This is NOT the target audience or target population.
- Provide your **Performance Monitoring Plan**. How will you monitor your progress toward achieving each **Goal**?
 - What are your data sources for monitoring performance? For example, will you conduct surveys or use questionnaires?
 - How will you collect the required data? Be sure to include the frequency of your data collection.
 - Describe how you will share the results of the project with specialty crop growers and other interested specialty crop stakeholders.

6. **Work Plan** – The following information should be included in this section. The work plan section may be in any format you choose as long as it contains the appropriate information. Below is an example of a work plan:

Timeline: Include a timeline that indicates when each activity will occur (at least month and year) and beginning and end dates for the project. Make sure the work plan timeline shows that the project will be completed within the allowable grant period.	Project Activity: Describe the project activities that are necessary to accomplish the objectives. Make sure you include your performance monitoring/data collection activities.	Who: Indicate the project participants who will do the work of each activity, including subrecipients, and/or contractors. If you request grant funds for personnel and contractors, you must include them in the work plan to demonstrate the requested funding is warranted. If you request funds for travel, these activities must also be included.
December 2014 – December 2016	Develop a marketing campaign with Maryland's Best to promote Maryland's nursery industry	Organization Y
January 2015	Develop budget	Marketing Committee
January – February 2015	Identify audience	Marketing Committee
February - March 2015	Create campaign messages	Marketing Committee
March - April	Identify appropriate media mediums, i.e. radio, tv, social networking	Marketing Committee
April – December 2015	Implement campaign	Marketing Committee
Ongoing	Measure results to website by using Google Analytics	Marketing Committee
January 2016	Review results and write report to	Organization Y

	MDA	
January - March	Modify budget, audience and messages based on results	Marketing Committee
April – December	Implement campaign	Marketing Committee
Ongoing	Measure results to website by using Google Analytics	Marketing Committee

7. **Project Commitment** – Describe the specialty crop stakeholders other than the applicant, individuals and organizations involved in the project who support this project and why.
8. **Budget and Budget Narrative** (provide projected budget include funding request, any match, and categories such as staffing, materials, travel, etc.). **See Attachment A** in Application on how to write a Budget Narrative.
9. **Tax-Exempt Organizations** will be required to submit Form 990 with application.

Attachment A

2015 Specialty Crop Block Grant Review Criteria Checklist

	Yes	No
Project Purpose How well does the applicant describe the project? Is the application complete? How well does the applicant define the issue, problem, opportunity or need for the project? Do the objectives correspond to the need? Is the approach rational and sound? How feasible is the proposed project? Is the project a priority for the specialty crops industry?		
Potential Impact and active participation from the industry Are producers actively involved in the project? Does the project provide a direct benefit to Maryland's specialty crop producers? If it's a marketing proposal, does it include Maryland's Best or Maryland Farm to School?		
Measurable Outcomes Does the project have at least one distinct, quantifiable, and measurable outcome that directly supports the project's purpose? If the project is using website visits as an outcome, is it using Google Analytics?		
Budget How reasonable and appropriate is the amount requested and budgeted for the project? Are matching funds or in-kind donations provided? How well does applicant leverage funds?		
Work Plan How well do the tasks relate to the project purpose? Is the timeline reasonable?		
Applicant Does the applicant have the organizational infrastructure to implement the grant? Did they include an organizational budget or annual report? Do the project partners seem committed to work toward the goals and outcome measures of the proposed project?		

Attachment B
Maryland Department of Agriculture's General Terms and Conditions

1. Changes: This Agreement may be amended only with the written consent of both parties.
2. Non-discrimination : Grantee may not discriminate on the basis of:
 - a. Political or religious opinion or affiliation, marital status, race, color, creed, or national origin;
 - b. Sex or age, except when age or sex constitutes a *bona fide* occupational qualification; or
 - c. The physical or mental disability of a qualified individual.
3. Drug- and Alcohol-Free Work Place: Grantee agrees to comply with Maryland=s policy concerning a drug and alcohol-free work place, as set forth in *COMAR 01.01.1989.18*, and shall remain in compliance throughout the term of this Agreement.
4. Termination for Non-Appropriation (Multi-Year Agreements): If funds are not appropriated or otherwise made available to support continuation in any fiscal year succeeding the first fiscal year, this Agreement shall be terminated automatically as of the beginning of the fiscal year for which funds are not available.
5. Termination for Convenience: MDA may terminate this Agreement, in whole or in part, without showing cause upon prior written notice to the Grantee specifying the extent and effective date of the termination. MDA shall pay all reasonable costs associated with this Agreement that the Grantee has incurred up to the date of termination, and all reasonable costs associated with termination of the Agreement.
6. Termination for Default: If the Grantee violates any provision of this Agreement, MDA may terminate the Agreement by giving the Grantee written notice of the termination.
7. Maryland Law Prevails: The law of Maryland shall govern the interpretation and enforcement of this Agreement.
8. Record-keeping/Audit: The Grantee shall retain and maintain all records and documents relating to this Agreement for three years after final payment by MDA hereunder or any applicable statute of limitations, whichever is longer, and shall make them available for inspection and audit by authorized representatives of MDA at all reasonable times.
9. Severability: It is understood and agreed by the parties hereto that if any of these provisions shall contravene, or be invalid under the laws of the particular state, county, or jurisdiction where used, such contravention or invalidity shall not invalidate the whole agreement, but the Agreement shall be construed as if not containing the particular provision or provisions held to be invalid in the said particular state, county, or jurisdiction, and the rights and obligations of the parties shall be construed and enforced accordingly.
10. Use/Return of Funds. The Grantee shall use all funds provided by MDA strictly in accordance with the Agreement, and return all funds not used should MDA decide that Grantee may not carry them over for use the following year. If the Agreement is terminated, the Grantee shall return all funds not used.
11. Sample of Agreement available upon request. (REVIEWED 5/5/14)